THE MOON & THOREAU

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HENRY D. THOREAU

THE MOON

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BY HENRY D. THOREAU

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
COMPANY
M CM XXVII

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FIVE HUNDRED COPIES PRINTED AT
THE SHAKESPEARE HEAD PRESS
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
ENGLAND

Note

WHEN THE THIRTY-NINE MANUSCRIPT VOLUMES OF THOREAU'S JOURNAL CAME into the hands of HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO. for publication, they were accompanied by some few odd pieces of manuscript of Thoreau's—transcripts from the Journal, evidently in process of being worked into lectures or essays. Among these was a sheaf of notes to which Thoreau had given the title of 'The Moon.' It seems probable that he had intended them to form the basis of a lecture, which, following the course usual with his writings, would eventually find periodical publication as an essay and later be included in a book. As a matter of fact, this did actually happen to a part of this 'lecture,' though not until after Thoreau's death; for a paper entitled 'Night and Moonlight' was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November, 1863, and was afterwards included in the posthumous volume

Excursions. It was probably sent to the *Atlantic* by his sister, Sophia Thoreau, who compiled the *Excursions*, but may have been edited by his friend, William Ellery Channing (the younger). It was much shorter than the present volume, occupying only about a dozen pages of the book.

It has seemed worth while to print these extracts from Thoreau's Journal just as he left them (with hardly a change except in punctuation) and to present them to the reader in a format in some degree worthy of their character. They are not to be judged as a finished essay, but Thoreau's writing always has distinction, and hardly the slightest entry in his Journal but has a dignity and beauty of its own. How many sentences could be found in our whole literature more serenely beautiful than this one from the entry for June 14, 1851, in the Journal? 'When man is asleep and day fairly forgotten, then is the beauty of moonlight seen

over lonely pastures where cattle are silently feeding.' Thoreau seems to have overlooked this particular passage in getting these notes together, but readers will find in these pages much good writing and here and there a sentence that will stand comparison with the best of English prose.

F. H. A

MY FRIENDS WONDER THAT I LOVE TO WALK ALONE IN SOLITARY FIELDS & WOODS BY NIGHT. YET SOMETIMES IN THE LONELIEST & WILDEST MIDNIGHT WALK, I HEAR THE SOUND OF the steam whistle and the rattle of the cars, where perchance some of those very friends were being whirled by night over what they think a well-known, safe, and public road. I see that men do not make or choose their own paths, whether they are railroads or trackless through the wilds, but what the powers permit each one enjoys. My solitary course has the same sanction that the Fitchburg Railroad has. If they have a charter from Massachusetts and, what is of much more importance, from Heaven, to travel the course and in the fashion they do, I have a charter, though it be from Heaven alone, to travel the course I do, to take the necessary land and pay the damages. Heaven has as strong an interest in the success of, and owns as much stock in, my road as in theirs, and perhaps it will turn out that one passenger

is carried as far in a year on my road as on theirs.

MANY MEN walk by day; few walk by night. It is a very different season. Take a July night, for instance. Instead of the sun, there are the moon and stars; instead of the wood thrush there is the whip-poor-will; instead of butterflies in the meadows fire-flies, winged sparks of fire—who would have believed it? What kind of cool, deliberate life dwells in these dewy shades associated with a spark of fire? So man has fire in his eyes, or blood, or brain. Instead of singing birds, the croaking of frogs and the intenser dream of crickets. The potatoes stand up straight, the corn grows apace, and in moonlight nights the bushes loom, the grain-fields are boundless, and the shadows of rocks and trees and shrubs and hills are more conspicuous than the objects themselves. The slightest irregularities in the ground are revealed by the shadows. And what the feet find comparatively smooth appears rough and diversified to the eye in

consequence. The smallest recesses in the rocks are dim and cavernous; the ferns in the wood appear of tropical size. The pools seen through the trees become as full of light as the sky. 'The light of day takes refuge in their bosoms,' as the Purana says of the ocean. The woods are heavy and dark. Nature slumbers. In the night the eyes are partly closed or retire into the head. Other senses take the lead. The walker is guided as well by the sense of smell. Every plant and field and forest emits its odors now, swamp-pink in the meadows and tansies in the road. The senses both of hearing and smelling are more alert. We hear the tinkling of rills which we never detected before. The rocks retain all night the warmth of the sun which they have absorbed. You lie on your back on a rock in a pasture (or the top of some bare hill) at midnight, and speculate on the height of the starry canopy. The stars are the jewels of the night, and perchance surpass anything which day has to show.

THERE are nights in this climate of such

serene and majestic beauty—so medicative and fertilizing to the spirit—that methinks a sensitive mind would not devote them to oblivion, and perhaps there is no man but would be better and wiser for spending them out of doors, though he should sleep all the next day to pay for it, nights which warrant the Grecian epithet ambrosial, when, as in the land of Beulah, the atmosphere is charged with dewy fragrance and with music, so that we take our repose and have our dreams awake.

THE HINDOOS compare the moon to a saintly being who has reached the last stage of bodily existence.

Not secondary to the sun, she
gives us his blaze again,
Void of its flame, and sheds a softer day.
Now through the passing cloud she seems to stoop,
Now up the pure cerulean rides sublime.
The whole air whitens with a boundless tide
Of silver radiance, trembling round the world.

Diana still hunts in the New England sky.

In Heaven queen she is among the spheres;
She, mistress-like, makes all things to be pure;
Eternity in her oft change she bears;
She Beauty is; by her the fair endure.

Time wears her not; she doth his chariot guide;
Mortality below her orb is placed;
By her the virtues of the stars down slide;
By her is Virtue's perfect image cast.

GREAT RESTORER of antiquity, great enchanter. In a mild night when the harvest or hunter's moon shines full, the houses in our village, whatever architect they may have had by day, acknowledge only Vitruviuses or a greater than Vitruvius. And the village is there as well as the forest.

In such a night let me abroad remain
Till morning breaks, and all's confused again.

NATURE is an instructed and impartial teacher, spreading no crude opinions, and flattering none; she will be neither radical

nor conservative. Consider the moonlight, so civil, yet so savage.

WHEN OSSIAN, in his address to the sun, exclaims,—

Where has darkness its dwelling,
Where is the cavernous home of the stars,
Where thou quickly followest their steps,
Pursuing them like a hunter in the sky,—
Thou climbing the lofty hills,
They descending on barren mountains?

who does not in his thought accompany the stars to their 'cavernous home,' and descend with them 'on barren mountains'?

NO doubt, as Raleigh says, 'the stars are instruments of far greater use than to give an obscure light, and for men to gaze on after sunset'; and, as Origen affirms, 'the stars are not causes, but are as open books, wherein are set down all things whatsoever to come,' if men could only read them, or, in the words of Plotinus, 'are significant but not efficient,'

and as Saint Augustine says, 'Deus regit inferiora corpora per superiora.' Hence quotes Raleigh, 'Sapiens adjuvabit opus astrorum, quemadmodum agricola terrae naturam'; a wise man assisteth the work of the stars, as the husbandman helpeth the nature of the soil.

No wonder that there have been astrologers so crude that some have conceived that they were related personally to particular stars. Dubartas, translated by Sylvester, says, he'll

not believe that the great architect
With all these fires the heavenly arches deck'd
Only for shew, and with these glistering shields
T' amuse poor shepherds, watching in the fields.

He'll

not believe that the least flow'r which pranks
Our garden borders, or our common banks,
And the least stone, that in her warming lap
Our mother earth doth covetously wrap,
Hath some peculiar virtue of its own,
And that the glorious stars of heav'n have none.

THE PURANA says, 'By day the gods are most powerful, and by night the demons,' but the demons are but the baffled and embittered representatives of a still older dynasty, whose atmosphere is as indispensable to the development of man's virtue as the dark night is to the corn.

HOW insupportable would be the days, if the night with its dews and darkness did not come to restore the drooping world! As the shades begin to gather around us, our primeval instincts are aroused, and we steal forth from our lairs like the inhabitants of the jungle, in search of those silent and brooding thoughts which are the natural prey of the intellect.

A CONSTANT intercourse with nature is necessary not only to the physical but the moral and intellectual health. The discipline of the schools or of business can never impart such serenity to the mind as the contemplation of natural phenomena. He only attains the heights of philosophy who contemplates

human affairs as calmly and from as great a remoteness as the man of science does his facts. In other words, the ethical philosopher needs the discipline of the natural philosopher.

THE BRAHMAN Saradwata, it is said in the Drama of Sacontala, was at first confounded on entering the city, 'but now,' says he, 'I look on it, as the free man on the captive, as a man just bathed in pure water on a man smeared with oil and dust.'

THEY who have been travelling long on the steppes of Tartary say, 'On re-entering cultivated lands the agitation, perplexity, and turmoil of civilization oppressed and suffocated us; the air seemed to fail us, and we felt every moment as if about to die of asphyxia.'

ONE night, as I entered a deep cut on the railroad a mile from the village, I was affected by beholding the first faint reflection of unmixed moonlight from the western sand-

bank, while the western horizon yet red with day was tinging the eastern side.

WHAT an immeasurable interval there is between the first tinge of moonlight which we detect lighting with mysterious silvery light the western slopes like a paler grass, and the last wave of daylight on the eastern ones! It is wonderful how our senses ever span it, how from being aware of the one we become aware of the other.

THE light of the moon! In what age of the world does that fall on the earth? It was as the earliest dewy morning light, and the daylight tinge more reminded me of the night. It was such a light, perhaps, as sufficed for the earliest ages. Yet a light not used and worn by man like that of the day, but stranger and more affecting. There were the old and new dynasties contrasted, and there was an interval between greater than between the most distant periods recorded in history, an interval which time cannot span. On that illustrated sandbank was revealed an anti-

quity beside which Nineveh is young. The Silver Age is not more distant from the Golden than moonlight is from sunlight; yet perchance nations have flourished in that light. In some such light, perchance, the Incas reigned.

I AM looking into the west, where the red clouds still indicate the course of departing day. I turn and see the silent, contemplative, spiritual moon shedding the softest imaginable light on the western slopes, as if, after a thousand years of polishing, their surfaces were just beginning to be bright; a pale whitish lustre. Already the crickets chirp to the moon a different strain, and the night wind blows, rustling the leaves, from where? What gave it birth?

THERE is the mysterious light which so lately illustrated Asia, and the scene of Alexander's victories, now, after three hours more spent in surmounting the billows of the Atlantic, come to shine on America. From what star has it arrived on this planet?

YET even at midday I see the full moon shining in the sky. What if, in some vales, its light only is reflected? What if there are some spirits who walk in its light alone still?—who separate the moonlight from the sunlight, and are shined on by the former only?

I PASSED from dynasty to dynasty, from one age of the world to another, from Jove, perchance, back to Saturn. What river of Lethe was there to run between? I bade farewell to that light setting in the west, and turned to salute the new light rising in the east.

I FEARED at first that there would be too much white light, like the pale remains of day, that it would be like a candle by day, and not a yellow and dreamy ray, the cream of light; but when I had got deeper into the night away from town, it was better.

I SAW by the shadows cast by the irregularities of the clayey mud-bank that it was necessary to see such surfaces by moonlight as well as sunlight to get a complete notion of them. This bank looked much more flat by day

when the light was stronger, but now its lit prominences were revealed and made remarkable by the dark shadows which they cast, and the whole scene was more variegated and picturesque than by day.

WHEN I had climbed the eastern bank, I felt a warmer current or stratum of air on my cheek, like a blast from a furnace. How long do the gales retain the heat of the sun? I find them retreated high up the sides of hills, they being the lightest especially on open fields or sprout-lands. Does, perchance, any of this pregnant air survive the dews of night, on elevated clearings surrounded by the forests, remembering the sun of yesterday even in the morning hours?

HERE was a blast which had come up from the sultry plains of noon and taken its station on the hills. It told of the day, of sunny noontide hours and banks, of the laborer wiping his brow, and the bee humming amid flowers. It was an air in which work had been done, which men had breathed.

THE note of the whip-poor-will which I hear suggests how far apart are the woods and the town. It is very rarely heard by those who live on the street, though it sometimes comes into their yards, and then it is thought to be a bird of ill omen. Many a man of middle age has never heard it at all. Only the dwellers on the outskirts of the village and belated travellers hear it occasionally. But go into the woods in a warm night at this season and it is the prevailing sound. I hear now five or six at once. It is, therefore, no more of ill omen here than the night and the moonlight are. It is a bird not only of the woods, but of the night side of the woods. New beings have usurped the air we breathe, filling the crevices of nature with sound while we are still. Would it not be a wild place to sleep where you might hear the whip-poor-will in your dreams?

I NOW descend around the corner of a grain-field, through a pitch-pine wood into a lower field more inclosed by woods, into a colder damp and misty atmosphere laden with the

condensed fragrance of plants distilled in dews, with much dew on the grass. It is as if I had descended gradually into a cold, fragrant vapour bath or lake, first up to my middle, then overhead. It is an atmosphere which has forgotten the sun, where the ancient principle of moisture prevails. There is something primal and creative in the dewy mist, which does not fail to suggest music to me unaccountably, and an infinite fertility. I seem to be nearer the origin of things.

RICH rye-fields are waving over all the land, more indefinite, more unbounded than ever now, their heads nodding in the evening breeze with an apparently alternating motion, i.e. they do not all bend at once, but separably, and hence this agreeable alternation. How rich a sight this cereal fruit, now yellow for the cradle—these long grain-fields which you must respect, must go round, occupying the ground like an army! The small trees and shrubs seen dimly in its midst are overwhelmed by the grain as by an inundation. They are only indistinct forms

of bushes and green leaves mixed with the yellow stalks. The yellow, waving, rustling rye extends far up & over the hills on either side, leaving only a narrow and dark passage at the bottom of a deep ravine. It is an impenetrable phalanx. I walk for a quarter of a mile beside these Macedonians, looking in vain for an opening. There is no Arnold Winkelried to gather these spear-heads upon his breast and make an opening for me. This is food for man. The earth labors not in vain; it is bearing its burden. How rankly it has grown! How it hastes to maturity! I discover that there is such a goddess as Ceres. There are certain crops which give me the idea of bounty, of the *Alma Natura*. They are the grains. Potatoes do not so fill the lap of earth. This rye excludes everthing else and takes possesion of the soil. It is a kind of pinafore to Nature. The farmer says, 'Next year I will have a crop of rye,' and he proceeds to clear away the brush, and either plows it, or, if it is very uneven or stony, burns and harrows it only, and scatters the seed with faith. All winter the earth keeps his secret, unless

it did leak out somewhat in the fall, and in the spring the early green on the hillsides betrays him. When I see this luxuriant crop spreading far and wide in spite of rocks and bushes and unevenness of ground, I cannot but think that it must have been unexpected by the farmer himself, and regarded by him as a lucky accident for which to thank fortune. As if he must have forgotten that he did it until he saw the waving grain inviting his sickle. This the gods had given to reward a transient faith.

WHEN I have risen to the same level as before, I find myself in the warm stratum again. These warmer veins in a cool evening like this do not fail to be agreeable, though the air is comparatively lifeless. Thus it circulates about from pillar to post, from woodside to hillside, like a dog that has lost its master, now the sun is gone.

ABOUT villages you hear the barking of dogs instead of the howl of wolves. The dog is the tamed wolf, as the villager is the tamed

savage. They are not as much stiller at night as man. They are on the alert, suspecting the approach of foes. The darkness, perchance, affects them, makes them mad and wild.

UNDER some circumstances this is a very interesting and even musical sound. The naturalist Richardson says of the North American dog, or that 'most generally cultivated by the native tribes of Canada, and the Hudson's Bay countries,' 'All the dogs of a camp assemble at night to howl in unison, particularly when the moon shines bright.'

AFTER whatever revolutions in my moods and experiences, when I come forth at evening as if from years of confinement to the house, I see the few stars which make the constellation of the Lesser Bear, in the same relative position—the everlasting geometry of the heavens. How incredible to be described are those bright points which appear in the blue sky as the darkness increases, said to be other worlds—like the berries on the hills when the summer is ripe! Even the

ocean of birds, even the regions of the ether are studded with isles. Far in the ethereal sea lie the Hesperian Isles, invisible by day, but when the darkness comes, their fires are seen from this shore, as Columbus saw the fires of San Salvador.

As I sat looking out the window the other evening just after dark, I saw the lamp of a freight-train, and further along at the same height, just over the train, a bright star which looked exactly like the former, as if it belonged to a different part of the same train. It was difficult to realize that the one was a feeble oil lamp, and the other perhaps a world.

A COMPANION with whom I was sailing one very windy but bright moonlight night in which the stars were few and faint thought that a man could get along with *them* though he was considerably reduced in his circumstances, that they were a kind of bread and cheese that never failed.

THE fault may be in my own barrenness, but

I think there is a certain poverty about the winter nights' sky. It appears less thickly starred and less habitable than in summer; rather a few bright stars brought nearer by the splendid twinkling in the cold sky than countless points in the warm deeps. This is the impression it makes. It may be that the stars of higher magnitude are more bright and dazzling and therefore appear more near and numerable, while those that appear indistinct and infinitely remote in the summer, imparting the impression of unfathomability to the sky, are scarcely seen at all. The front halls of heaven are so brilliantly lighted that they quite eclipse the more remote. The sky has fallen many degrees.

YET I am somewhat oppressed and saddened by the sameness and apparent poverty of the heavens, that these irregular and few geometrical figures which the constellations make are not other than those seen by the Chaldean shepherds. I pine for a new world in the heavens as well as on the earth, and though it is some consolation to hear of the

wilderness of stars and systems invisible to the naked eye, yet the sky does not make that impression of variety and wildness that even the forest does, as it ought. It makes an impression rather of simplicity and unchangeableness, as of eternal laws, this being the same constellation which the shepherd saw, and obedient still to the same law. It does not affect me like an unhandselled wilderness. I seem to see it pierced with visual rays from a thousand observations. It is more the domain of science than of poetry. But it is the stars as not known to science that I would know, the stars which the lonely traveller knows.

THE Chaldean shepherd saw not the same stars which I see, and if I am elevated in the least toward the heavens, I do not accept his classification of them. I am not to be distracted by the names which they, the ancients, have imposed. The sun which I know is not Apollo, nor is the evening star Venus. The heavens must be as new as the earth is new at least.

THAT classification of the stars is old and musty; it is as if a mildew had taken place in the heavens, and the stars so closely packed had heated and moulded there. If they appear fixed, it is because that hitherto men have been necessitated to see them thus. I see not merely old but new testaments in the skies. Do not I stand as near the stars as the shepherds did? The heavens commonly look as dry and meagre as our astronomies, are mere troops, as the latter are catalogues, of stars. The milky way yields no milk. Though observatories are multiplied, the heavens receive very little attention. A few good anecdotes is our science, with a few imposing statements respecting distance and size, and little or nothing about the stars as they concern man—teaching how he may survey a country or sail a ship, and not how he may steer his life.

THE astronomer is as blind to the significant phenomena, or the insignificance of phenomena, as the woodsawyer who wears glasses to defend his eyes from sawdust. The

question is not what you look at, but what you see.

ASTROLOGY contained the germ of a higher truth than this. It may happen that the stars are more significant and truly celestial to the teamster than to the stronomer. Nobody sees the stars now. They study astronomy at the district school and learn that the sun is ninty-five million miles distant and the like —a statement which never made much impression on me because I never walked it, and which I cannot be said to believe. I and all of you would be greatly surprised if any of those statements should ever prove true. But the sun shines nevertheless.

THE naked eye may easily see further than the armed. It depends on who looks through it. No superior telescope to this has been invented. In those big ones the recoil is equal to the force of the discharge. The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling ranges from earth to heaven, but this the astronomer's does not often do. It does not see far beyond the dome of the observatory.

COMPARED with the visible phenomena of the heavens the anecdotes of science affect me as trivial and petty. Man's eye is the true star-finder, the comet-seeker.

WHEN I get into the road, though far from the town, I feel the sand under my feet, and hear my steps, and it is as if I had reached my own gravelled walk. I no longer hear the whip-poor-will nor regard my shadow, for here I *expect* a traveller. I catch myself walking merely. I have no thoughts to record all the way home. This part of my walk is comparatively barren. The road leads my steps and thoughts alike to the town. I see only the path, and my thoughts wander from the objects which are presented to my senses. I am no longer in place. It is conformity, walking in the way of men. If I had got over the wall, I should have been in faery-land. I would except that in one place I suddenly saw the moon with her attendant stars reflected full from a puddle in the road, and for a moment the earth dissolved under my feet.

WHEN I walk on the railroad causeway in winter nights, I am disturbed by the sound of my steps on the frozen ground. I wish to hear the silence of the night—for it is something positive to be heard. I cannot walk with my ears covered. I must stand still and listen with open ears far from the noises of the village, that the night may make its impression on me, a fertile and eloquent silence. I must hear the whispering of a myriad voices. Silence alone is worthy to be heard. It is of various depths and fertility like soil. Now it is a mere Sahara where men perish of hunger and thirst, now a fertile bottom or prairie of the West. As I leave the village, drawing nearer to the woods, I listen from time to time to hear the hounds of silence baying the moon, to know if they are on the track of any game. If there is no Diana in the night, what is it worth?

THE silence sings; it is musical and thrills me. I remember nights in which the silence was audible. I heard the unspeakable.

IF night is the mere negation of day, I hear

nothing but my own steps in it. Death is with me, and life far away. If the elements are not human, if the winds do not sing or sigh, as the stars twinkle, my life runs shallow.

I MEASURE the depths of my own being; I walk with vast alliances. I am the allied powers, a Holy Alliance absorbing the European potentates.

THUS I get home.

IF there is a more splendid moonlight than usual, only the belated traveller observes it. When I am on the outskirts of the town, enjoying the still majesty of the moon, I am wont to think that all men are aware of this miracle, that they too are silently worshipping the same beauty elsewhere. But when I go into the house I am undeceived. They are absorbed in checkers, or dress, or a novel, though they may have been transiently advertised of the brightness through the shutters.

AT sundown on river, May 9th, '53. I LOVE to paddle now at evening when the water is smooth and the air begins to be warm. This has been almost the first warm day. The rich warble of blackbirds about retiring is loud and incessant, not to mention the notes of numerous other birds. I hear the pumplike note of a stake-driver from the fens across the river. (Heard the first the 7th ult.) Now at starlight the squeak of snipes is heard over the meadow, but not their hovering sound. The first bat of the season goes suddenly zigzag overhead through the dusky air, and is immediately lost to sight again.

(A WRITER) says of this animal, 'By day, hanging from the vault of sepulchral grottoes, it imitates the absolute stillness of the dead in his shroud.' By night it is 'the skeleton with the scythe sailing through the regions of darkness with silent flight.'

A SLUMBEROUS snoring croak now comes up from the meadow's edge, from some species of frog recently awakened. I save a

floating plank which exhales and imparts to my hands the rank scent of muskrats which have squatted on it. Already men are fishing for pouts.

MAY 17th, '53. Large insects begin to fly at night. *Dumping* of frogs at eve begun, telling the weather is warm.

FIRST nighthawk *seen* May 17th, '53.

I COMPLAIN of Arctic voyagers that in their accounts they do not enough remind us, directly or indirectly, of the peculiar dreariness of the scenery, and the perpetual twilight of the Arctic night. So he whose theme is moonlight will find it difficult to illustrate it with the light of the moon alone, though this, I think, is necessary.

IF my pages were written in a larger character, I would extinguish these lamps, and, standing by a window, read them by the light of the moon alone.

I FEAR that I have not put duskiness enough

into my night and moonlight walks. Every sentence should contain some twilight or night; at least the light in it should be the yellow or creamy light of the moon, with at most a silvery radiance, or the fine beams of stars, and not the white or dazzling light of day. Occasionally a mere phosphorescence, or gleaming as from rotten wood. Nor should any complain if at rare intervals it is uncertain and wandering, far over treacherous bogs like an *ignis fatuus*. The peculiar dusky serenity of the sentences must not allow the reader to forget that it is evening or night, though I do not warn him of the darkness. Otherwise he will, of course, presume a daylight atmosphere.

THE moon is accumulating yellow light and triumphing over the clouds, but still the west is suffused here and there with a slight red tinge, marking the path of day. Though the inexperienced might call it night, it is not yet. While the moon is behind a cloud in the east, dull, heavy clouds lie along the western horizon, exhibiting the forms of

animals and men. Why do we detect these forms so readily? Whales or giants, or busts of reclining heroes — Michael-Angelic? There is the gallery of statuary of mankind. Not a board upon an Italian's head, but those dark figures along the horizon. The board some Titan carries on his head. What firm and heavy outlines for such soft and light material!

I HEAR now from this remote hill a human voice, some laborer singing after his day's toil. Loud it must be, for it is far away. Methinks I should know it for the voice of a civilized man. Some strains have the melody of an instrument. And now I hear the sound of a bugle at a still greater distance, reminding me of poetic wars. A few flourishes and the bugler has gone to rest. I rarely walk by moonlight without hearing some strain from a flute or horn or clarionet, or a human voice.

HOW sweet and encouraging the sound of some artificial music heard from the midst

of woods or from the top of a hill at night, borne on the breeze, from some distant farm-house. That is a civilization one can endure, worth having. I could go about the world listening for the strains of music. Men use this gift but sparingly, methinks. How rare among men so fit a thing as the sound of a flute at evening! What should we think of a bird which had the gift of song, but used it only once in a dozen years? as some plants are said to blossom only once in a century.

I HAVE heard one playing on his flute at evening half a mile off through the houses of the village—every note with perfect distinctness. It seemed a more beautiful communication with me than the sending up of a rocket would have been. Men have brought this art to great perfection, the art of modulating sound, by long practice since the world began, and attained to great superiority over the rude harmony of savages.

NOW his day's work is done, the laborer plays his clarionet. It is possible only at this

hour. He *serenades* himself; that is, he establishes the serenity of the hour in his mind. He practises this ancient art. Contrasted with his work, what an accomplishment! It is, perhaps, man's most admirable accomplishment. Some drink and gamble; *he* plays some well-known march. But the music is not in the tune; it is in the sound. It does not procced from the trading nor political world.

It is a performer I never see by day. I should not recognize him if pointed out, but you may hear his performance in every horizon. He plays but one strain and goes to bed early, but I know by the character of that single strain that he is deeply dissatisfied with the manner in which he spends his day. He is a slave who is purchasing his freedom. He is Apollo watching the flocks of Admetus still on every hill, and he plays this strain every evening to remind him of his heavenly descent. It is all that saves him, his one redeeming trait. It is a reminiscence; he loves to remember his youth. He is

sprung of a noble family; he is highly related, I have no doubt; was tenderly nurtured in his infancy, poor hind as he is. That noble strain he utters instead of any jewel on his fingers, or precious locket fastened to his breast, or purple garments that were left with him. The elements recognize him and echo his strain. Ah! the dogs know him, their master; though lords and ladies, rich men and learned know him not. He is the son of a rich man, of a famous man, who served his country well. He has heard his sire's stories. I thought of the time when he would discover his parentage, obtain his inheritance, and sing a strain suited to the morning hour. He cherishes hopes.

I NEVER see the man by day who plays that clarionet.

AH, yes, even here in Plymouth horizon Apollo is at work for King Admetus—whose other name is Getting-a-Living. This is what makes mythology true and interesting to us.

THE moon was as yet eclipsed by a vast bank of cloud in the eastern horizon, which seemed to rise faster than it, and I feared would obscure it all the night.

BUT suddenly she rises above the clouds, and when a few moments after I think to look again for that dark bank, it has vanished, or a mere filmy outline only can be faintly traced beneath her in the sky lit by her rays. It was only her splendor behind it which made this evil look so huge and threatening—for it seemed to threaten her as well as me—but now it has vanished and is forgotten like an ugly dream.

SHE comes on thus magnifying her dangers by her light, at first revealing, displaying them in all their hugeness and blackness, exaggerating them, then casting them behind into the light concealed. She goes on her way triumphing through the clear sky, like a moon which was threatened by dark clouds at her rising, but rose above them. That black impenetrable bank which I feared would be the ruin of all my hopes is now

a filmy dash of vapour with a faint purplish tinge far in the eastern sky.

So is it ever with evils triumphed over and put behind us—for I bear in mind that it is not so much we that triumph as our star for us.

As the twilight deepens and the moonlight is more and more bright, I begin to distinguish myself—who I am and where; as my walls contract I become more collected and composed, and sensible of my own existence, as when a lamp is brought into a dark apartment and I see who the company are. With the coolness and the mild silvery light I recover some sanity, my thoughts are more distinct, moderated, and tempered. Reflection is more possible while the day goes by. The intense light of the sun unfits me for meditation, makes me wander in my thought, my life is too diffuse and dissipated, routine succeeds and prevails over me. The trivial has greater power then, and most at noonday, the most trivial hour of the twenty-four.

THE sun lights this world from without, shines in at a window in the empyrean, but at night, when we are roofed in by darkness, the moon is like a lamp within an apartment. It shines for us. The stars themselves make a more visible and hence nearer and more domestic roof at night. We feel the Great Spirit of Nature brooding us. She has not left our germs of thought to be hatched by the sun. Even like young birds we feel her heat and see her body darkening over us. Our thoughts are not dissipated but come back to us like an echo.

THE moon is a mediator. She is a light-giver that does not dazzle me. I can look her in the face. I am sobered by her light and bethink myself. It is like a cup of cold water to a thirsty man.

IT is a cold and dewy light in which the vapors of the day are condensed, and though the air is obscured by darkness, it is more clear. It is said that 'the light of the moon condensed by the best mirrors produces no

sensible heat upon the thermometer.' True lunacy must be a cold excitement, not such insanity as a torrid sun on the brain would produce.

BY moonlight all is simple. Objects are for the most part robbed of their colors even, and tried by truer tests. Science does not lay much stress on color. They appear often as one substance. We are not oppressed by their multitude but can erect ourselves. We are no longer distracted. Indian council by night. It is simple as bread and water, simple as the rudiments of an art—a lesson to be taken before sunlight perhaps, to prepare us for that.

HAVING entered the thick woods, I see the moonlight reflected from particular stumps and the stems of trees here and there, where all around is in shadow—a silvery light—as if the moon selected what to shine on. I haste forward, expecting to find some decayed and phosphorescent stump, but find it to be a little clear moonlight that falls in

through a crevice between the leaves, though I cannot easily tell which one to refer it to. These small fractions of light amidst the shade on the forest floor remind me of a plant which I have never seen, called moonseed—as if the moon were sowing it in such places. It is a good name for a plant of some kind.

THE moonlight night does not begin much before ten o'clock. When man is asleep and day fairly forgotten, then the beauty of moonlight is seen over lonely pastures where cattle are silently feeding. Let me walk then in a diversified country of hill and dale, with heavy woods on one side and copses or scattered trees and bushes and rocks enough to produce shadows.

THIS is a light, of course, which we have had all day, but which we have not appreciated, and it proves how remarkable a lesser light can be when a greater has departed. How simply and naturally the moon presides now! 'Tis true she was eclipsed by the sun,

but now she acquires an almost equal respect and worship by reflecting and representing him, with some new quality, perhaps, added to his light, showing how original the disciple may be. Yet still in midday often she is seen, though pale and cloudlike beside him. Sometimes I see her in the afternoon high in the east when two-thirds full, a pale and modest cloud looking spirit-like on these daylight scenes; and she seems to shine even with a not reflected light.

SUCH is a worthy disciple. In his master's presence he still is seen and preserves a distinct existence, and in his absence he reflects and represents him, adding some new quality to his light. Not servile, never rival. As the master withdraws, this pale disciple begins to emit a silvery light, acquiring at last a tinge of golden as the darkness deepens, but never heat enough to scorch the seeds which have been planted, or to dry up the fertilizing dews which are falling.

THE woodland paths are not the same by

night as by day. If they are a little grown up, the eye cannot find them, but must give the reins to the feet, as the traveller to his horse.

IT is eleven o'clock. I sit upon a cliff in the woods two hundred feet above the river. The wind blows and the river flows still without resting. At night you are sure to hear what wind there is stirring, and what water flowing, if you are near it. The moonlight is reflected from seemingly endless forests.

HOW STILL and moderate is the night! No scream is heard, whether of fear or joy; no great comedy or tragedy is being enacted. I am surprised that I hear no yell from a wild beast or spirit. The chirping of crickets is the most universal, if not the loudest, sound. There are no French revolutions in Nature, no excess. She is only warmer or colder by a degree or two.

I SEE the northern lights over my shoulder, to remind me of the Esquimaux, and that they are still my contemporaries on this globe—that they too are taking their walks

on another part of the planet, in pursuit of seals perchance.

As I look down from this height on yonder pond, or expansion of the river, a quarter of a mile distant, I do not perceive any bright or yellow light on its surface, but a dark oily and glasslike smoothness on its southwestern bay, through a very slight mistiness. Two or three pines appear to stand in the moonlit air on this side, while the enlightened portion of the water is bounded by the heavy reflection of the wood on the east. Yet I can faintly trace the zigzag shore of sheeny pads even here.

It is so soft and velvety a light as contains a thousand placid days sweetly put to rest in the bosom of the water. It reminds me of lakes (which I have seen or dreamed of) in the midnoon of Indian Summer days, but is yet more placid and civilized, suggesting a higher cultivation which aeons of summer days have gone to make. Like a summer day seen far away. These are all the effects of sun-

light, with a softer tone, and all this stillness of the water and the air superadded. Just as in the middle of a November day, when all the surface is as one cobweb gleaming in the sun and heaving gently to the passing zephyr; except that this was the chaster light of the moon, the cooler temperature of the night, and there were the deep shades of night fencing it round and imbosoming it.

IF such a scene is there to be seen in the remotest wilderness, does it not suggest its own inhabitants to enjoy it?

WHAT gods are they that require so fair a vase of gleaming water to their prospect in the midst of the wild woods by night? Else why this beauty allotted to night?—a gem to sparkle in her zone. They are strange gods now out. Methinks their names are not in any mythology.

A SMILE as in a dream is on the face of the sleeping lake.

IT tells of a far-away, long-passed civilization, of an antiquity superior to Time, unappreciable by time. A certain refinement, civilization, in nature, which consists and increases with the wildness—the light that is in night. I am not advertised of any deficiency of light. There is light enough to show what we see—what night has to exhibit; any more would obscure these objects.

I HEAR the sound of a brook falling into the pond—inexpressibly refreshing to my senses. It seems to flow through my very bones. I listen with insatiable thirst. It allays some sandy heat in me.

IT affects my circulations. Methinks my arteries have sympathy with it. What is it I hear but the pure waterfalls within me, in the circulation of my blood,—the streams that fall into my heart? The sound of this gurgling water running thus by night as by day falls on all my dashers, fills all my buckets, overflows my float-boards, turns all the machinery of my nature, makes me a flume,

a sluice-way to the springs of Nature. Thus I am washed; thus I drink and quench my thirst.

ALL walkers may hear where the streams fall into the lake, if they are only a few inches more elevated.

THE northern lights now as I descend the hill have become a crescent of light crowned with short shooting flames—or the shadows of flames, for sometimes they are dark as well as white.

NOW the fire in the north increases wonderfully, not shooting up so much as creeping along, like a fire on the mountains of the north seen afar in the night. The Hyperborean gods are burning brush, and it spread, and all the hoes in heaven couldn't stop it. It spread from west to east over the crescent hill. Like a vast fiery worm it lay across the northern sky, broken into many pieces, and each piece, with rainbow colors skirting it, strove to advance itself toward

the east, worm-like, on its own annular muscles. It has spread into their choicest woodlots. Now it shoots up like a single solitary watch-fire or burning bush, or where it ran up a pine-tree like powder; and still it continues to gleam here and there like a fat stump in the burning, and is reflected in the water. The illusion is the more perfect, for I smell a burning on the earth. And now I see the gods by great exertions have got it under control, and the stars have come out without fear.

ON the top of a bare rocky hill (on Conantum) I sit awhile (in the shade of the woods), and look out on the moonlit fields. White rocks are more remarkable than by day.

THE air is warmer than the rocks now. It is perfectly warm, and I am tempted to stay out all night, and observe each phenomenon of the night until day dawns. But if I should do so, maybe the whole town would be raised to hunt me up. I could lie out here on this pinnacle rock without cold. Think

of lying here on your back, with nothing between your eye and the stars, nothing but space, they your nearest neighbors on that side, be they strange or be they tame, be they other worlds or merely ornaments to this! Who could even go to sleep under these circumstances?

I THINK of the inhabitants of Arctic regions, for I feel related to the most distant inhabitants of the globe as to the nearest. Osborn, in his Arctic Journal, tells us that 'the inhabitants of these regions, as well as the animals, retire to rest with as much regularity as is done in more southern climates; and the subdued tints of the heavens, as well as the heavy banking of clouds in the neighborhood of the sun, gives to the arctic summer night a quietude as marked as it is pleasant.'

SINCE I sat here a bright star has gone behind the stem of a tree, proving that my machine is moving, proving it better for me than a rotating pendulum.

AND now the star appears on the other side of the tree, and I must go.

STILL no dew up here.
I see three scythes hanging on an apple tree.

AT half past one I arose, stepping very carefully, not to disturb the household, and still carefully in the street not to disturb the neighbors. I did not walk naturally and freely till I had got over the wall. Then I went to the river and bathed. Afterwards I took my way toward a lonely hill three miles distant.

THE world and its affairs were all put to rest. I had stepped at once into midnight without introduction. There was no twilight to go through.

WHAT an entertainment for the traveller, in such a night as this, the incessant motion apparently of the moon traversing the clouds. Whether you sit or stand, it is always preparing new developments for you.

It is the drama of the moonlight nights, and event enough for a simple mind. You all alone, the moon all alone, overcoming with incessant victory whole squadrons of clouds, above the forests, and the lakes and rivers, and the mountains. You cannot always tell which cloud she will undertake next—forever wading through them. Though she is eclipsed by this one, I see her shining on a more distant but lower one. What innumerable encounters she has had with them!

YOU can never foretell her fate—whether she will prevail over or be obscured by them half an hour hence. She will disappoint all expectation. Her own light creates the shadows in the approaching clouds and exaggerates her apparent destiny.

WHEN she is obscured, I so sympathize with her that I could whip a dog for her relief, as Indians do.

IT does not concern men who are asleep in their beds, but it is very important to the

traveller whether the moon shines bright and unobstructed or is obscured. It is not easy to realize the serene joy of all the earth when she commences to shine unobstructedly, unless you have often been abroad by night.

THE traveller's sympathy with the moon makes the drama of the drifting clouds indescribably interesting. In the after-midnight hours she is his sole companion as well as guide, and all his thoughts are centered in her. His whole employment is to calculate what cloud is destined to shut out her cheering light, and what she will triumph over. She is waging continual war with them in his behalf. What cloud will enter the lists with her next? She employs his thoughts. When she enters on a clear field of great extent in the heavens, and shines unobstructedly, he is glad. And when she has fought her way through all the squadrons of her foes, and rides majestic in a clear sky, unscathed, and there are no more any obstructions in her path, he cheerfully and con-

fidently pursues his way, and rejoices in his heart, and the cricket also seems to express joy in its song. But if he sees that she has many new clouds to contend with, he goes forward moodily, as one disappointed and aggrieved; he resents it in his mind as an injury to himself.

I COME out thus into the moonlit night where men are not, as if into a scenery anciently inhabited by men but now deserted by them. Their life is like a dream to me. It is three thousand years since night has had possession. Go forth and hear the crickets chirp at midnight, and learn if their dynasty is not an ancient one and well founded. Night surely repossesses herself of her realms, as if her dynasty were uninterrupted or she had underlain the day. I go by the farmers' houses and barns standing there in the dim light under the trees, as if they lay at an immense distance, or under a veil. The farmer and his oxen now all asleep. Not even a watch-dog awake. The human slumbers. There is less of man in the world. The

interests which the New England Farmer Almanac are concerned about are all slumbering; they belong to a different order of things.

YOU MIGHT say of a philosopher that he was in this world as a spectator. To one standing on the utmost heights of philosophy mankind and the works of man will often have sunk out of sight. Man is altogether too much insisted on. One poet says, 'The proper study of mankind is man,' but I say, take wider views of the universe. That is the egotism of the race. Think of our childish, gossiping, social literature, mainly in the hands of the publishers. When another poet says that the world is too much with us, he means, of course, that man is too much with us. In the promulgated views of man, in institutions, in the common sense, there is narrowness and delusion. It is our weakness that so exaggerates the virtue of philanthropy, and makes it the highest human attribute. The world will sooner or later outgrow philanthropy, and all re-

ligion based on it mainly. They cannot long sustain our spirits. In order to avoid delusions I would fain let man go by sometimes, and behold a universe in which he is but as a grain of sand. I am sure that those of my thoughts which consist or are contemporaneous with social and personal connections, though they may be humane and tender, are not the wisest and most universal. What is the village, city, State, nation, aye, the civilized world,—that it should concern a philosopher so much? It is a comfortable place to nestle, no doubt, and we have sympathizing friends and a hearth there, but I have only to get up at midnight —aye, to soar or wander a little in my thought by day—to find them all slumbering. Look at our literature. What a poor, puny, social thing, seeking sympathy! The author troubles himself about his readers—would fain have one before he dies.

NOT satisfied with defiling one another in this world, we would all go to heaven together! To be a good man means but little

more than to be a good citizen and neighbor. Mankind is a gigantic institution; it is a community to which most men belong. It is a test which I would apply to my companion, can he forget man? Can he see this world slumbering?

I DO not value any view of the universe into which man and his institutions enter at once and necessarily and absorb a great share of the attention. Man is but the place where I stand and the prospect hence is infinite. This world is not a chamber of mirrors which reflect me. When I consider, I find that there is other than me, a past phenomenon to philosophy. The universe is larger than enough for his abode. Some rarely go outdoors; most are always at home at night; very few indeed have stayed out all night once in their lives; fewer still have gone behind the world of humanity and seen its institutions like mushrooms by the wayside.

I WOULD draw a circle which should em-

brace man and all his interests. Without it he would be unknown. The philosopher is he who can step without this circle and see man but as a phenomenon in the horizon.

I HEAR the clock strike three.

THE light of Orion's belt seems to show traces of the blue day through which it came to us; the sky is at least lighter on that side than in the west, even about the moon. Even by night the sky is blue and not black, for we see through the shadow of the earth into the distant atmosphere of day. I see to the plains of the sun, where the sunbeams are revelling.

FROM this remote hill-top I hear a farmer harnessing his horse and starting for the distant market. But no man harnesses himself, and starts on worthier enterprises. One cock-crow tells the whole story of a farmer's life.

SITTING on the sleepers of the bridge

which is being repaired, now at half-past three I hear a cock crow. How admirably adapted to the dawn is that sound! as if made by the first rays of light rending the darkness—the breaking of the sun's axle heard already over the eastern hills.

THOUGH man's life is mean and trivial, Nature is holy and heroic. With what infinite faith and promise and moderation each new day begins!

AND now the first signs of morning attract the traveller's attention, and he cannot help rejoicing, and the moon begins gradually to fade from his recollection. The wind rises and rustles the copses.

THE clock strikes four.

A FEW dogs bark. A few more wagons start for market, their faint rattling heard in the distance, and I hear my owl without a name, the murmur of a slow-approaching freight-train, as far off perhaps as Waltham, and one early bird.

THE round red moon disappearing in the west, I detect a whiteness in the east. Some dark massive clouds have come over from the west within the hour, as if attracted by the approaching sun, and have arranged themselves ray-wise about the eastern portal, as if to bar his coming. They have moved suddenly and almost unobservedly quite across the sky—which before was clear—from west to east. No trumpet was heard which marshalled and advanced these dark masses of the west's forces thus rapidly against the coming day. Column after column the mighty West sent forth across the sky, while men slept, but all in vain.

THE eastern horizon is now grown dun-colored, showing where the advanced guards of the night are already skirmishing with the vanguard of the sun, a lurid light tinging the atmosphere there, while a dark-columned cloud hangs imminent over the broad portal untouched by the glare.

A CUCKOO flies over, making a noise like

the barking of a puppy. It is yet so dark that I cannot find my pencil which I have dropt —and I kept my place half-an-hour till it was light enough to see it.

STANDING as I am on the top of a rocky hill, it reminds me of an adventure of Madame Pfeiffer's on a caravan journey from Mossul in Mesopotamia to Roanduz. The way led through a mountain pass, where they heard the noise of the stones which they had set in motion rolling down into the abyss.

'WE had been going along thus,' says she, 'for about an hour, when the moon all at once became covered with thick clouds, and the darkness was so total that we could scarcely see a step before us. Our leader kept constantly striking fire with a flint, in order that the sparks might enable us to see where we were going, but this was not sufficient, and the animals began to stumble and slip, and soon there was nothing for it but to halt and stand motionless one behind an-

other—as if we had suddenly been changed to stone—till morning. But with the dawn of light our life returned again, and we cheerfully urged on our steeds, and soon found ourselves in an indescribably beautiful circle of mountains.'

THE sound of the cars as they come on slowly is like that of a rushing wind. I thought at first a morning wind was rising.

AND now, maybe at half-past four, I hear the sound of some far-off factory bell, arousing the operatives to their labors. It sounds very sweet here. Very likely it is some factory which I have never seen, in some valley which I have never visited. Yet now I hear this which is its only matin bell sweet and inspiring as if it summoned holy men and maids to worship, and not factory girls and men to resume their trivial toil. As if it were the summons of some religious or even poetic community—the matin bell of some holy community who in a distant valley dwell, a band of spiritual knights,—thus

sounding far and wide, sweet and sonorous, in harmony with their own morning thoughts. What else could I suppose fitting this earth and hour? Some man of high resolve, devoted soul, has touched the rope, and by its peals his brethren and sisters are waked from peaceful slumbers to fragrant morning thoughts. Why should I fear to tell that it is Knight's factory bell at Assabet? A few melodious peals and all is still again.

AFTER I have spent the greater part of a night abroad in the moonlight, I am obliged to sleep enough more the next night, or perhaps the next day, to make up for it,—*Endymionis somnum dormire* (to sleep an Endymion sleep), as the ancients expressed it. And there is something gained still by thus turning the day into night. Endymion is said to have obtained of Jupiter the privilege to be always young and sleep as much as he would. Let no man be afraid of sleep, if his weariness comes of obeying his genius. It depends on how a man has spent his day,

whether he has any right to be in his bed even by night. So spend some hours that you may have a right to sleep in the sunshine. He who has spent the night with the gods sleeps by day as innocently as he who is fatigued by the ordinary labors of the day by night.

CATO says, 'The dogs must be shut up by day that they may be more sharp (*acriores*), more fierce and vigilant by night.' So I might say of a moon- and star-gazer.

THAT kind of life which sleeping we dream that we live awake, in our walks by night we waking live; while our daily life appears as a dream.

YET Nature seems not to have designed that man should be much abroad by night; and by the faintness and rareness of the moon's light compared with that of the sun she perhaps expresses her intention with regard to him. Perchance the moon shines sometimes merely to tempt man forth to

view creation by night, but soon wanes to warn him that day is the season appointed for his labors.

As we grow older is it not ominous that we have more to say about evening, less about morning? We must associate more with the early hours.

MIGHT I not write on sunshine as well as moonshine? Might I not observe the sun at least when the moon does not show her crescent?

WHAT if we were to walk by sunshine with equal abstraction, yet with equally impartial observation and criticism! As if it shone not for us, but we had come forth into it independently to admire it, not distracted by any business. By moonlight we are not of the earth earthy, but we are of the earth spiritual. So might we walk by sunlight, seeing the sun but as a moon—a comparatively faint and, in fact, reflected light—and the day as a brooding night in which we glimpse some stars still.

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